

Fresno service honors Armenians who died as saints

By BoNhia
Lee

Fresno Armenian clergy held a requiem service for the Unknown Armenian Martyr, part of a commemoration of Armenian Genocide events, at Ararat Cemetery in Fresno. THEFRESNOBEE

- About 100 Fresno-area Armenians gathered at Ararat Cemetery for a special service to remember those who died during the genocide.
- The martyrs who died for their faith and country were celebrated as saints.
- The 12-minute service included chanting and singing of new hymns.

Under a warm evening sun, Fresno-area Armenians gathered Thursday at Ararat Cemetery where they heard new prayers and hymns in a special service to remember those who died during the Armenian genocide a century ago.

The 12-minute service at the Memorial of the Unknown Martyr at the West Belmont Avenue cemetery celebrated the Armenians massacred by the Ottoman Turks between 1915 and 1923 as saints, not martyrs as they had been known before, said the Rev. Yeghia Hairabedian, pastor of St. Gregory The Illuminator Armenian Apostolic Church in Fowler.

The Armenian national church on Thursday canonized the victims who died for their faith and country as saints.

“Before, we asked God to rest them in peace,” Hairabedian said. Now that they are saints, “we pray and thank God for their testimony and ask for their intercessory prayers for us.”

About 100 people gathered at the memorial where the remains of an unknown Armenian martyr are interred and marked by a monument near a flagpole. Meher Chekerdeman, a board member for the cemetery association, said the remains actually belong to more than one person. Local Armenians have held requiem services to honor the dead at the monument for years.

Thursday’s ceremony was emotional for Chekerdeman. “My parents — my dad and mom — went through it,” he said as his voice cracked and tears welled in his eyes.

Hairabedian and three other local Armenian religious leaders conducted the service mostly in Armenian. There were prayers, chanting and hymns.

“We don’t know who is buried here, but this soul is happy today along with the 1.5 million” others who died, Hairabedian said to the crowd. “May God bless them. May God bless us the survivors. May God bless us all.”

Contact BoNhia Lee: blee@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6495 or [@bonhiale](https://twitter.com/bonhiale) on Twitter.